

Southwest Region Planning Commission Regional Environmental Planning Program

Success Stories

December 2001

Southwest Region Planning Commission's Regional Environmental Planning Program allows the Commission to serve member municipalities in the area of environmental protection, as well as provide service delivery in partnership with the NH Department of Environmental Services. An over-arching goal of SWRPC's REPP is to enhance the Region's understanding of the relationships among the land's physical (and ecological) suitability for development, municipal land use regulations, public investment in infrastructure and services, and regional socio-economic trends – and the implications for community development and conservation.

Representative materials from three of the many activities the REPP has supported in the Southwest Region since 1998 are provided here.

Soil-Based Limitations to Development. A primer on the use of the tremendous amount of landscape information in the USDA Soil Surveys for Cheshire and Hillsborough Counties, with summary analyses of the relative prevalence of soil types as rated for various developed or managed uses by the USDA in the Southwest Region. This report was distributed to Southwest Region Planning Boards and Conservation Commissions in 1999.

Local Resource Protection Priorities. SWRPC conducted research into the municipal priorities for protection of natural and cultural resources as part of a state-wide effort to measure the level of demand for the then-proposed Land & Community Heritage Investment Program. The research and outreach also served to guide local officials and special interests in organizing strategies for protecting and managing important community resources. The 1998 report of that research is included here.

Non-Point Source Pollution Education for Municipal Officials (NEMO). Non-point source pollution (NPS) may be the top threat to water quality today. NPS is most easily described as contamination of the environment from many small, routine activities, such as car exhaust, soil eroding from construction sites, litter, and toxic substances washed from parking lots and roads in rain water.

SWRPC conducted two workshops in 2000 to introduce a planning process and land use standards recommended by the NH Department of Environmental Services, US EPA and USDA for prevention of NPS. Topics covered included: bringing environmental protection goals into community plans by way of a Natural Resources Inventory; choosing the right zoning standards to prevent NPS; and choosing the right site standards to prevent NPS. The Planning Commission made a slide presentation of measures that are common practice today in most urban and suburban areas and could be made better use of in suburban and rural New Hampshire.

Natural Resources Inventory Assistance. The Natural Resources Inventory is a basic element of community planning – an important way to bring information and social values about the natural environment into the policy and regulations of community planning. Few towns have formal NRI's. The reasons most often cited by Conservation Commissions and Planning Boards for not developing a municipal NRI can be summarized as “it is an overwhelming task”.

SWRPC co-sponsored a workshop in March 2001 with the NH Association of Conservation Commissions: “Creating and Using the Municipal Natural Resources Inventory”. The workshop provided guidance on basic steps to create the NRI, an overview of information resources, guidance on integrating the NRI in municipal land use planning practices, and four GIS maps depicting local and regional resource information. Two PowerPoint™ presentations that were the foundation of the workshop are included here. The workshop was attended by 75 people representing the Conservation Commissions and Planning Boards of 25 Southwest Region towns. The REPP allows SWRPC to provide staff support to towns moving on from the workshop with NRI activity.

For further information contact Jeff Porter or Tim Murphy of the SWRPC staff.